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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CAIRO 006958

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: CODEL DAVIS SEPTEMBER 2-5 VISIT TO CAIRO: MUBARAK

Classified by DCM Stuart E. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

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Summary  
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1. (C) In an ebullient mood on the eve of the Egyptian presidential election, President Mubarak told visiting CodeL Davis that the main reason he was running for president was because the process would fail without him, given the candidates that had chosen to run. While affirming the importance of his decision--which transferred the choice for President from "300 members of the People's Assembly to the people themselves," Mubarak warned that pressure to speed up the pace of democracy in the region would be counterproductive. Mubarak said the Gaza disengagement was a significant first step for which Sharon deserved credit but he hoped there would now be progress on the West Bank issue. On Iraq, Mubarak affirmed that Egypt had been pressing Sunni leaders to accept the constitution, but he noted that resistance was strong and he feared that the Sunnis would use the October referendum to reject the constitution setting the Iraq process back to square one. End summary.

2. (SBU) Representative Tom Davis (R-VA), Representative Darrell Issa (R-CA), his spouse Katherine Issa, Representative Marty Meehan (D-MA) his spouse Mrs. Ellen Meehan, Representative Al Wynn (D-MD), his spouse Mrs. Gaines Wynn, Representative Michael Turner (R-OH), his spouse Mrs. Lorie Turner, Representative Steve Chabot, (R-OH) his spouse Mrs. Donna Chabot, Representative Carolyn Maloney (D-NY), her spouse Mr. Clifton Maloney, Representative Nathan Deal (R-GA), his spouse Mrs. Sandra Deal, Representative Kendrick Meek (D-FL) his spouse Mrs. Leslie Meek met with President Mubarak for 40 minutes September 5 in Cairo. Professional staff members from the Government Reform Committee John Cuaderes, Ron Martinson, Larry Brady, Charles Phillips, David Rapallo, Frederick Hill, Gabriele Forsyth, and Darcie Brickner joined the meeting at the end. The CODEL was accompanied by the Charge and ECPO MinCouns (notetaker). Foreign Minister Aboul Gheit and Presidential spokesman Ambassador Soliman Awad joined the President.

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Mubarak on Elections and Democracy  
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3. (C) Chairman Davis opened the meeting by presenting President Mubarak with a framed copy of House Resolution 384 adopted on July 27, 2005 to express support for Egypt after the Sharm El-Sheikh bombing attack. Mubarak expressed his appreciation for the efforts of the House and added his condolences for the Hurricane Katrina tragedy. Mubarak quickly turned to his decision to press for multi-candidate elections for president. Noting that these elections provided people the right to choose their leader "for the first time since the pharaohs," Mubarak said the main driving force for his decision was to remove the power to decide who would be President from the People's Assembly to the people. Mubarak said he has asked himself what the situation would be in 10 or 15 years if the People's Assembly was full of people who "seek to destroy democracy." Noting Egypt's experience with terrorism and the assassinations of Government officials, Mubarak said "we know these people" and if they take power it will be the end of freedom. Instead of 300 people deciding on the leadership (the two thirds majority required in the previous referendum system) at least 20 million eligible voters likely to vote could make the choice.

4. (C) As to the timing of the decision, Mubarak said he had had the thought in his mind "for 24 years." He said he had raised the idea with a select group in the People's Assembly in February of this year with the idea of going ahead before the end of the parliamentary session. The reaction had been negative, he said, and he had decided to just go ahead with the decision.

5. (C) Later in the discussion, Congressman Meehan (D-MA) expressed his concern over how the Presidential elections would be monitored, asking Mubarak for his assurances that the elections would be free and fair. The President responded emphatically that the Presidential Election Commission was opposed to any interference in the elections. They are very independent, he said. When he had "asked about observers" he had been told that Egypt was one of the few

countries in the world to allow judges into the polling places to monitor elections. All involved in the process had refused to allow monitors, he said.

16. (C) When Congressman Meehan asked how the President felt after campaigning, Mubarak responded he had expected the "bad words" and attacks, but joked that ten candidates for a Presidential election was excessive. Speaking more seriously, Mubarak said he had decided to run in these presidential elections "for one reason: to make this process a success." If he had not run, he emphasized, the whole process would have collapsed given those who had chosen to run. If that had happened, he warned, Egypt would have returned to a referendum and lost all the progress that had been made.

17. (C) Congressman Turner (R-OH) expressed his appreciation for the strong bilateral relationship. President Mubarak responded by cautioning against too much outside pressure on the pace of democracy in the region, noting that change must come gradually or the region will turn against the U.S. Using the example of Saudi Arabia, Mubarak said that cultural and historical factors made it very difficult for that country to accept democracy. Democracy might not work and pressure could lead to violence. Some could then turn these disturbances against the U.S., Mubarak warned, and this would be very bad for the region and also for Egypt.

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Gaza disengagement  
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18. (C) Chairman Davis (R-VA) asked Mubarak for his views on the Palestinian issue, Gaza disengagement and relations with Israel. Mubarak explained how he had brought PM Sharon and President Abbas together in Sharm El Sheikh. He said Sharon was a leader capable of succeeding on Gaza disengagement because of his strength. After complete Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, Mubarak said, he hoped for progress on the West Bank. This would not be easy, he underlined, and would take time. In response to the Chairman's suggestion that Gaza could be a "bomb," Mubarak expressed complete agreement stating that this was particularly likely if the entry points into Gaza were closed. He said that he was working with PM Sharon and Defense Minister Mofaz to underline this point and he believed they understood it. He said he had told them "be careful, you have made a very good step forward" but had cautioned that without a positive approach Gaza could become a "bomb" and create problems for all.

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Iraq  
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19. (C) In response to the Chairman's question on Iraq, Mubarak explained that Egypt had contacted Sunni leaders to press for cooperation on the constitution. The reaction had been negative, he said, because the Sunni were "furious" at the Shia and believed the Shia were taking advantage of them. Mubarak said he would continue his efforts but his greatest fear was that the Sunni will soundly reject the constitution in the October referendum. "Then we will be back to zero and have to start again," he warned. This will be extremely negative for the progress that is being made he said, but noted although the situation was tough, he would continue to work the issue.

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Congressional exchanges on the relationship  
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110. (C) Congresswoman Maloney (D-NY), expressed her appreciation for Mubarak's historic decision on the multi-candidate presidential elections. Mubarak responded with praise for the strong strategic relationship with the U.S., noting Egypt's shared military objectives in the region. In this vein, he decried resistance in the Israeli Knesset to the deployment of Egyptian border guards to the border with Gaza based on claims that Egypt sought to invade Israel. He emphasized that Egypt had no intention of invading anyone in the region.

111. (SBU) Congressmen Deal (R-GA) thanked Mubarak for Egypt's role in support of Gaza disengagement after reminding the President of Georgian Jimmy Carter's link to Egypt. Representative Meek (D-FL) expressed his support for Egypt's regional role. Representative Chabot (R-OH) noted that President Mubarak had acted on democracy and with Israel--two things he had asked the President for help on during his visit to Egypt earlier this year. Representative Wynn (D-MD) congratulated Mubarak for reforms to the telecommunication sector. Representative Issa (R-CA) noting Issa's frequent visits to the region, thanked Mubarak for receiving the group.

112. (U) Codel Davis did not have the opportunity to clear this message before it departed Egypt.

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